

## **A VISION FOR THE GREENVILLE AREA PRESENTED BY JOHN SIMKO, GREENVILLE TOWN MANAGER**

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### **ABOUT JOHN SIMKO**

Town Manager John Simko began his current position with the Town of Greenville in May of 2000. Born in Dover-Foxcroft, John grew up in Sebec. He graduated from Bowdoin College in 1992 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology and Environmental Studies. After graduation, Simko worked for then-Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell in Washington, DC as a Legislative Correspondent. John also worked as News Director at WDME-FM in Dover-Foxcroft, and later as Community Development Director for the Town of Dexter. In 1997, Simko was named Town Manager of Sangerville. John held his post as Sangerville Town Manager until 2000 when he began his current position for the Town of Greenville. John serves not only the Town of Greenville but also the entire region through his service on the many committees, boards, and commissions including the Maine Department of Transportation Regional Transportation Advisory Committee #3, Moosehead Trail Corridor Committee, Legislative Task force on Growth Management, Maine Woods Coalition, and others.

### **PROMOTING AND MAINTAINING DIVERSITY IN THE ECONOMIC BASE**

Greenville has always have a strong tourism base, but also relies on a historically strong wood products industry. The 1990's mill closures prompted a discussion in town about the future of Greenville, resulting in a realization that the region will fare best with a mixture of a wood products economy and a non-consumptive tourist economy. Most recreation (particularly motorized recreation such as snowmobiling) is weather-dependent, resulting in a "feast and famine" business cycle. A diversified economy alleviates many of the problems with a weather-dependent economy. Diversifying Greenville's economy involves filling the town's industrial park (e.g. growing business via the Greenville business incubator and through research & development cooperatives such as the wood composites collaboration with University of Maine). It also includes diversifying tourism and recreation, particularly promoting and enabling activities that are less affected by weather fluctuations (e.g. non-motorized recreation such as cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, hiking, etc). Overlaying the tourism economy with a non-motorized component that would work in concert with existing motorized activities will likely alleviate the "feast and famine" business cycle of current tourism businesses in Greenville. LURC should allow for this type of diversity in its Plan revision.

### **CHALLENGES FACING THE GREENVILLE AREA**

The main challenges that currently exist to making the diversified economy function include uncertainty in the wood supply base and the lack of "critical mass".

There is a lack of assurances that a long-term wood supply will exist in the region because of rapid land use and ownership changes in the land base. This tends to keep the woods products industry from locating in Greenville. The problem of uncertainty is compounded by the current export of raw wood product materials to Canada, and is viewed as a loss of potential value-added products. A possible solution for Greenville is to promote growth in the mature forest products industry via research & development (e.g. wood composites) and thus commercializing on value-added products.

There is also a lack of a "critical mass" of year-round population/workforce. While the population of Greenville has risen due to an increase in the retirement-age population, the number of young families in Greenville has been on the decline. This shift in population demographics is a blessing and a curse. On the positive side, the retirement community typically requires fewer public service, has personal assets or income and adds tax value via seasonal or residential property. However, as the ratio of retirees replaces the ratio of young families/professionals, the workforce and student populations decline resulting in a significant tax rate impact. Greenville's plan is to try to

accommodate a growing retiree community, but at the same time attract the workforce by making the region appealing to young professionals.

The problem of “critical mass” is worsened by sprawl. Sprawl discourages growth and investment in consolidated areas – unmanaged sprawl will kill this area. Greenville offers a majority of public services to the region (including fire protection, solid waste, recycling, schooling and public amenities such as sidewalks, parks, the junction wharf, downtown tennis courts, and gazebo). A lack of a critical mass has negative impacts to these services as well as the hospital and school, the two most important institutions for employment and community for Greenville and the surrounding region. Sprawling development results in an inequitable tax base where people who live in outlying communities beyond the town border do not pay for many of the services provided by Greenville. To be a vibrant and sustainable service center, Greenville must have a critical mass of population, infrastructure, resources and tax revenue to be sustainable and to support development in outlying areas.

LURC’s efforts with the level 2 subdivision process, which aims to encourage subdivision and development near existing service center communities, can be characterized as “almost getting there but not quite”. It is that outlying population in the surrounding territories that is most egregious at budget times, since Greenville residents end up fully paying for many of the public services provided to the outlying communities. The possible solution involves a more equitable taxation structure and funds available for infrastructure improvements. With adequate funding, Greenville could handle development in adjacent towns better. Nonetheless, development in townships adjacent to Greenville is viewed more favorably than development further away.

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